

VZCZCXRO1738
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #0598/01 0971534
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071534Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5696
INFO RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 1095
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0169
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1785
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0741
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000598

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA
BAGHDAD FOR DMCCULLOUGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/05/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: BUHARI DISCUSSES LACK OF GON SINCERITY ON
ELECTORAL REFORMS

REF: ABUJA 529

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On April 1, Political Counselor (accompanied by Poloff notetaker and Political Specialist) met with General Muhammadu Buhari and his associate, Abubakar Buba Galadima. Buhari expressed dismay regarding the state of electoral reform in Nigeria and pointed out that he has said all along that the government is not sincere in its reform efforts. Buhari said that the watered down version of electoral reform recommendations which evolved from the GON's white paper report of the Electoral Reform Committee's (ERC) recommendations further demonstrates that the process "has been rigged". Still, although he was initially completely dismissive of the ERC, he said that he was impressed with the quality of submissions which were received during public hearings held around the country, which he believed had greatly strengthened the ERC's report (Note: The USG funded many of these stakeholder discussions on electoral reform through USAID. End Note.). Buhari and Galadima both said that, as stakeholders in the success of Nigeria, the international community must respond to the electoral reform crisis, but Buhari noted that the bottom line is that the lack of democracy in Nigeria is the Nigerians' problem. He added that there is still capacity for the Nigerian elite to ensure free and fair elections. Buhari also substantiated his participation in the creation of a "mega-party" (see reftel), which confirms his break from the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP). End Summary.

¶2. (C) On April 1, Political Counselor met with General Muhammadu Buhari and his associate, Abubakar Buba Galadima in Abuja. Although in previous conversations with PolCouns Buhari was dismissive of the ERC (largely due to his lack of trust in Chairman Uwais, who had been Chief Justice at the time of the rejection of Buhari's appeal against the 2003 elections), following the release of the final report he now felt the need to correct his previous view; but he tried to do so by claiming that the submissions the ERC received all over the country were so good that the committee had no choice but to produce a good report. PolCouns pushed back, noting that the ERC members themselves had obviously done a lot of work on their own which was reflected in the ERC's final report.

¶3. (C) Buhari reminded PolCouns that he has maintained that the GON is not genuine in its efforts for electoral reform. He reasoned that the ineffectual list of electoral reform recommendations that was ultimately accepted by the GON following the revision of the ERC's report by the Federal Executive Council and Minister of Justice Aondoakaa (whom Buhari disdainfully referred to as "this famous Minister of Justice we have") demonstrates that the entire process "has been rigged". In fact, Buhari said he believes that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) will go as far as to declare Yar'Adua as a second term president without even holding 2011 elections. But, Buhari said that he does not think Nigerians will accept disregard for democracy anymore. He said that while following the 2007 elections Nigerians brought their disputes to court believing that they had a fool-proof case, in 2011 he is of the opinion that Nigerians will no longer tolerate less than credible elections and implied that the reactions may be violent. Galadima added that if it were not for Buhari's calls for peaceful political processes in 2007 that there would have already been violence. (FYI: Buhari also made similar calls for peace in 2003. End FYI.)

¶4. (C) Buhari and Galadima said that as stakeholders in the success of Nigeria, the international community must act, otherwise, they warned, "people of conscience" will potentially have to deal with problems such as "thousands" of refugees as a result of violent outbreaks which they said may occur if there is continued lack of reform. Galadima said that Nigerian "crooks fear the strong American word" but the lack of a "hard hammer" coming down on them has only

ABUJA 00000598 002 OF 002

encouraged their corruption. Galadima also claimed that a mere 100 people steal Nigeria's national wealth. Still, Buhari acknowledged that in the end electoral reform is Nigeria's problem and it is up to Nigerians to solve it. He believed there is still capacity for the elite to get together to ensure free and fair elections, provided they have the will to do so. He also cited reports of grassroots discontent recently highlighted in a series on the BBC's Hausa Radio Service.

¶5. (C) PolCouns asked Buhari if the current effort to form a "mega-party" out of smaller opposition parties is feasible, and if the new grouping has a chance to remain united, given Nigeria's history of such efforts being brought down by the conflicting ambitions of their leaders. Buhari acknowledged that attempts by the opposition parties to form such an alliance before the 2007 elections failed because the members could not agree on a candidate, but he believes this time the discussions are serious and an alliance is likely to take place.

¶6. (C) Comment: We agree that the PDP is looking to ensure that the 2011 polls are another "election like event" rather than a credible election, and that, if his health permits, Yar'Adua will almost certainly be the PDP candidate, and presumptive "winner" of such polls, regardless of the actual vote count. As for the attempt to create an opposition "mega-party" we remain unconvinced that it will be able to agree on a single presidential candidate or remain united over the next two years. End Comment.

¶7. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS